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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum

THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
15 November 1965

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
FURTHER DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION
CONTAINED HEREIN IS NOT AUTHORIZED

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15 November 1965

HIGHLIGHTS

Heavy fighting apparently continues between US and Viet Cong units near Plei Me. Five prisoners taken by US forces in the battle all claim to be from North Vietnamese units. In North Vietnam, Communist jet fighters on 15 November unsuccessfully attacked two US reconnaissance aircraft near Dien Bien Phu, the first instance of such an attack outside the Hanoi area.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: Heavy fighting apparently continues between battalion-strength elements of the 3rd Brigade/US 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) and Viet Cong/PAVN main force units west of Plei Me (Paras. 1-2). In Binh Duong Province, elements of the US 1st Infantry Division and the 7th ARVN Regiment, supported by three consecutive days of B-52 strikes, continue large-scale ground sweeps against regimental-strength Viet Cong troop concentrations and base camps (Para. 3-5). In Binh Dinh Province, the 1st Brigade/US 101st Airborne Division has terminated Operation SAYONARA, the 47-day area and route security action in the vicinity of Qui Nhon (Para. 6). A review by COMUSMACV indicates that carrier-based USN A4s attacked Xuan Hoa village in the DMZ on 13 November through pilot error (Para. 8).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: Premier Ky is back in Saigon following his trip to South Korea (Para. 1). The body of a Japanese irrigation engineer, apparently murdered by the Viet Cong, reportedly has been found near the coast northeast of Saigon (Para. 2).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam: Communist jet fighters attempted unsuccessfully to intercept two US reconnaissance aircraft near Dien Bien Phu on 15 November, the first noted instance of such activity outside the Hanoi area (Paras. 1-2).

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IV. Other Communist Military Developments: Nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: Concern over internal security problems may account for Hanoi's recent efforts to repatriate foreign nationals from North Vietnam (Para. 1).

VI. Other Major Aspects: The first significant southbound movement of trucks this dry season has been observed on Route 23 (Paras. 1-2).

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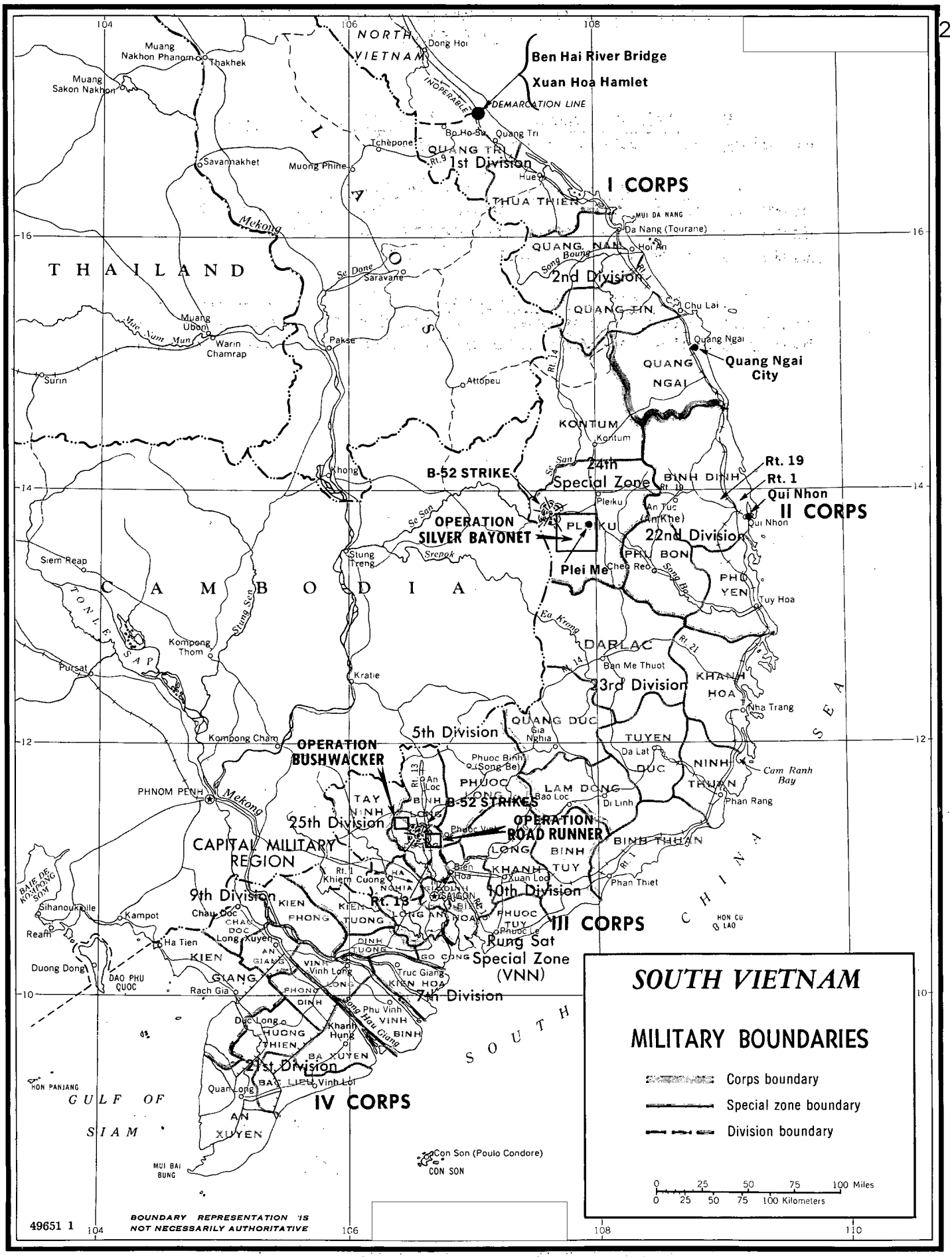

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Heavy fighting apparently continues between battalion-strength elements of the 3rd Brigade/US 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) and Viet Cong/PAVN main force units west of the embattled Vietnamese Special Forces camp at Plei Me, in the central highlands of Pleiku Province. According to MACV, at least two PAVN battalions have engaged US 1st Cavalry forces participating in Operation SILVER BAYONET. The ground sweep has thus far resulted in estimated enemy losses of 1,321 killed (376 by US body count), five captured, and 15 weapons (11 crew-served) seized. US casualties to date stand at 77 killed and 127 wounded. In addition, two US helicopters, and one A1E Skyraider have been downed by enemy ground fire. These statistics, reported by MACV, are apparently cumulative totals since the beginning of SILVER BAYONET on 10 November.

The five prisoners have identified themselves as members of the 304th, 320th, and 325th PAVN divisions. Neither the 304th nor the 320th has been identified in South Vietnam, however, and these prisoners probably belong to composite infiltrated units.

2. The US forces engaged west of Plei Me have received continuous tactical air and artillery support. Last night 18 USAF B-52s bombed a suspected multibattalion PAVN assembly area four miles east of the Cambodian border, and just west of the present fighting. Heavy smoke in the drop zone has thus far prevented bomb damage assessment.

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3. On 13 November, 21 Guam-based USAF B-52 Stratofortresses attacked a complex of five separate but adjacent Viet Cong targets near the Binh Duong - Binh Long Province border, approximately 30 nautical miles northwest of Saigon. It was the third B-52 saturation bombing mission in this area in three days against suspected Viet Cong base camps and regimental-strength troop concentrations.

4. The 7th ARVN Regiment is presently conducting ground follow-up sweep operations in the vicinity of the B-52 strike zones. Meanwhile, Operation ROAD RUNNER, initiated on 10 November by one battalion of the US 1st Infantry Division to provide route security along Highway 13 for 7th ARVN Regiment troop movements, continues according to plan. The battalion has reported no further significant contact with enemy units since it was attacked while in bivouac position by an estimated Viet Cong main force battalion during the night of 10-11 November. Casualties on both sides in that engagement have been revised upward by MACV, with Viet Cong losses currently placed at 248 killed (198 by US body count) and six captured, as against 20 US infantrymen killed and 83 wounded.

5. On 14 November, four battalions of 3rd Brigade/US 1st Infantry Division initiated a search-and-destroy operation near the former French-owned Michelin Rubber Plantation in the northwestern sector of Binh Duong Province. The ground sweep codenamed Operation BUSHWACKER, is being conducted in conjunction with Operation ROAD RUNNER and ARVN 7th Regiment operations in the B-52 strike zones. The four US battalions have thus far encountered no enemy resistance.

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6. In central coastal Binh Dinh Province, the 1st Brigade/US 101st Airborne Division has terminated Operation SAYONARA--an action conducted from 28 September to 13 November to provide area and route security for Highways 1 and 19 in the vicinity of Qui Nhon. Cumulative Viet Cong losses were placed at 352 killed (88 by US body count), 52 captured, and 151 suspects detained. American casualties totaled 18 killed and 74 wounded.

7. On 13 November, in Quang Ngai Province, a patrol of 120 Vietnamese CIDG Special Forces personnel, accompanied by one US and three Australian advisers, established contact with an estimated Viet Cong company northwest of Quang Ngai city. In the firefight that ensued, two Australians were killed and 10 Vietnamese wounded. Enemy losses were unknown.

8. A review by COMUSMACV indicates that carrier-based A4s attacked Xuan Hoa village in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) on 13 November as the result of pilot error. One South Vietnamese policeman was reportedly killed and one wounded; two civilians were also wounded. Several buildings, one a Buddhist pagoda, and the center span of the bridge over the Ben Hai River were damaged. The North Vietnamese Liaison Mission has sent a protest to the International Control Commission.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Premier Ky returned to Saigon yesterday after an absence of six days on an official trip to South Korea. His public comments on his visit, which he described as "very fruitful," added nothing further on the substance of his talks with Korean officials.

2. A Japanese irrigation engineer, missing in South Vietnam since 9 November, reportedly was found dead over the weekend in a rice field near Phan Rang, Ninh Thuan Province, about 170 miles northeast of Saigon. The engineer, Takashi Ota, reportedly had been shot in the head with his hands tied behind his back, presumably the victim of Viet Cong terrorists. An American volunteer aid worker, with a private organization under contract to the US AID mission, was ambushed and murdered by the Viet Cong in the delta on 12 November.

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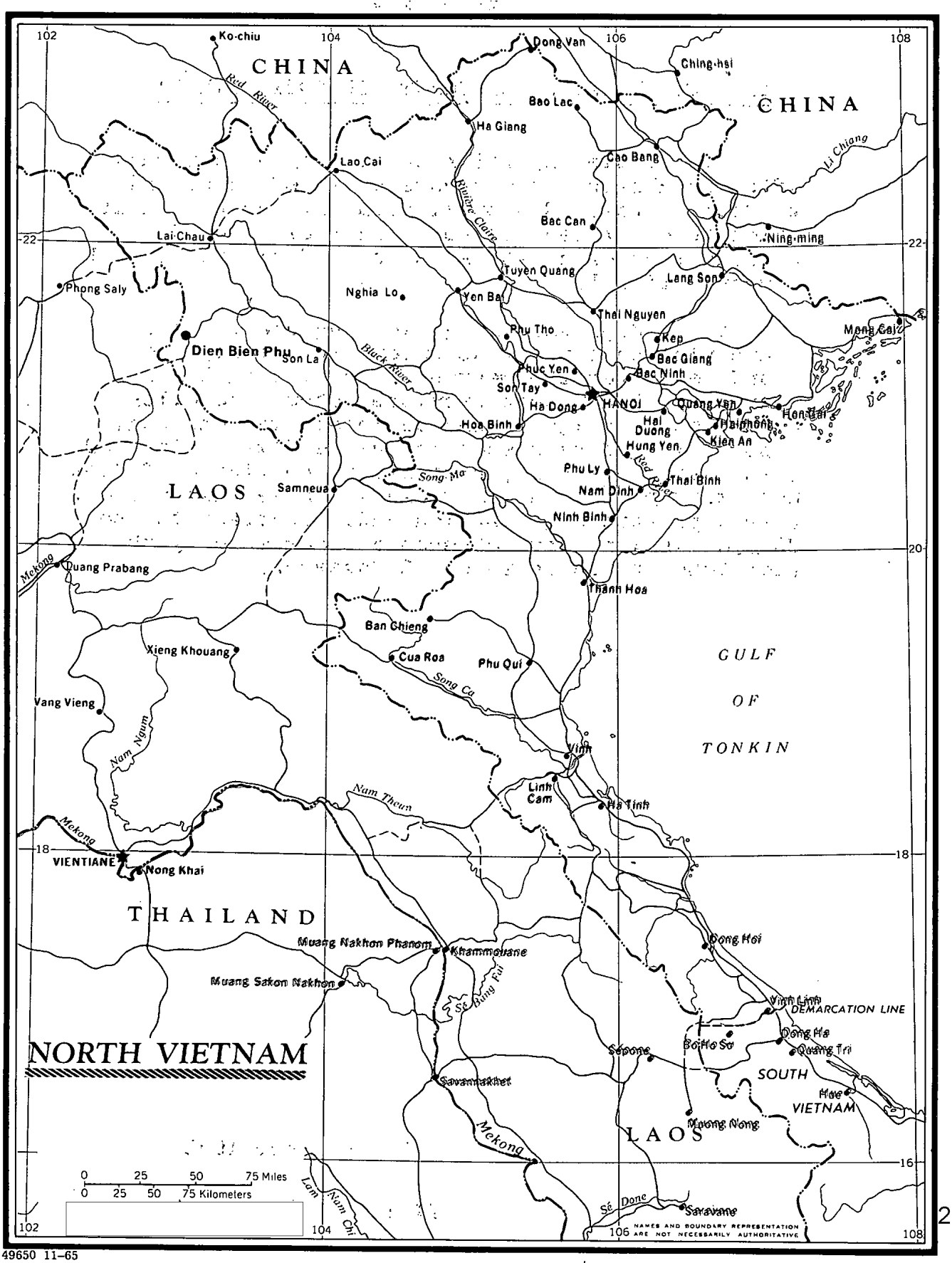

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. Two US RF-101 Voodoo aircraft on a photo mission over the DRV were intercepted by MIGs northeast of Dien Bien Phu on 15 November. The RF-101s successfully evaded attack and returned safely to their base.

2. No further information is available at this time. North Vietnamese jet fighters--while staying clear of armed fighters--have made several attempts in recent weeks to attack US support aircraft such as reconnaissance, ELINT, and rescue aircraft. The presence of MIG fighters in the Dien Bien Phu area would mark a significant departure from past practice; DRV fighter activity has normally been confined to the general Hanoi area.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Concern over internal security problems may explain Hanoi's recent efforts to repatriate foreign nationals from North Vietnam. The exodus of foreigners to date is small but growing and is confined largely to former French legionnaires who remained in North Vietnam after the cessation of hostilities in 1954. Two Greek nationals were repatriated last spring after more than ten years of residence in North Vietnam and in early October the DRV asked the British consul general to assist in the repatriation of 15 Spaniards together with their Vietnamese wives and children. In November Hanoi announced that an agreement had been reached with the Tunisian Government to repatriate 20 Tunisians who were former legionnaires.

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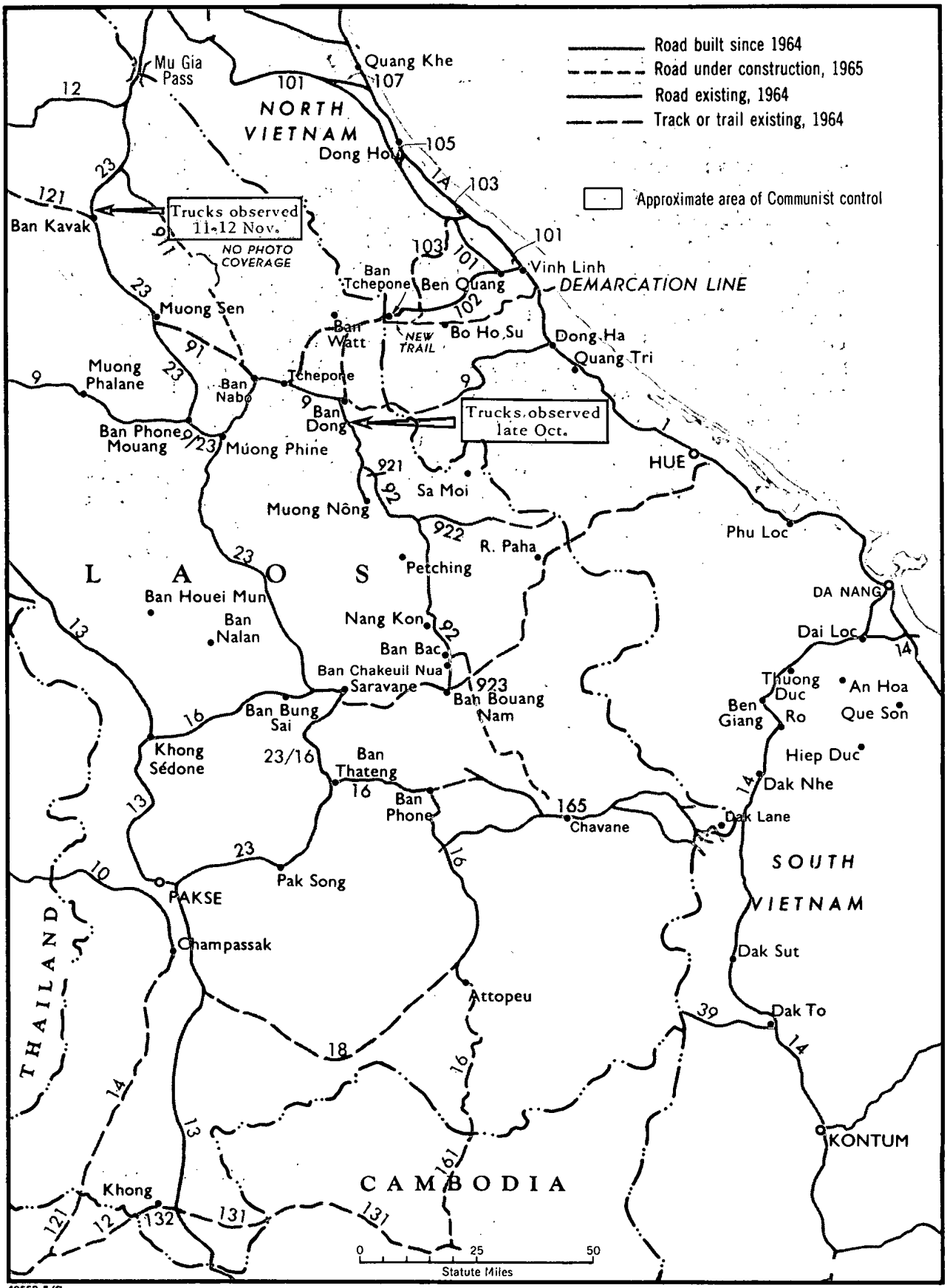
SOUTHEASTERN LAOS



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VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. The first significant southbound movement of trucks in Laos this dry season has been observed on Route 23 by a roadwatch team located on the northern section of the route. A total of 59 trucks moved south between 11 and 12 November. Forty two of the trucks reportedly contained unidentified Communist troops. In addition, 120 troops were seen walking south during the same period.

2. Meanwhile, no vehicular traffic has been seen recently by the roadwatch team located in the Mu Gia Pass area. According to one informant, however, the North Vietnamese have recently completed a new route bypassing the damaged sections of the pass. The informant did not say whether the bypass is being used by trucks. Farther south, informants report that trucks were moving south on Route 92 in late October in numbers as large as 17 at a time.

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